

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Please rewrite the claims to read as follows:

Please cancel claims 16-18, and 21, 22 without prejudice.

1. (Currently Amended) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:  
separating data blocks referenced by a writable virtual disk (vdisk) from data blocks referenced only by a backing store of a storage system, the method comprising the steps of:  
creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at locations referencing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
loading blocks of the writable vdisk from a disk into a memory, the loaded blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular hole of the plurality of holes;  
loading blocks of the backing store from a disk into the memory, the loaded blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect block, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a data block;

22           searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and  
23           replacing each field having a hole in the writable vdisk indirect block with a new  
24   pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block  
25   field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the  
26   writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk  
27   was created.

1    2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2    ~~wherein the step of replacing comprises the step of:~~  
3           dirtying the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable  
4    write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.

1    3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2    ~~wherein the step of replacing further comprises the steps of:~~  
3           choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing the an unal-  
4    tered data content;  
5           setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
6           placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the writ-  
7    able vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1    4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 3 further comprising ~~the step of :~~  
2           freeing the dirty data block; and  
3           writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1    5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4 further comprising ~~the step of :~~  
2    releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby  
3    separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the pointers contained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields comprise logical volume block numbers (VBNs).

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the invalid pointers contained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields comprise a zero logical volume block number (VBN).

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk indirect block are a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of fields in the backing store indirect block are a backing store level 1 buffer.

9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for operating a computer data base  
~~separating data blocks referenced by a writable virtual disk (vdisk) from data blocks referenced only by a backing store of a storage system, the apparatus~~, comprising:

a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at locations referencing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

a backdoor message handler adapted to load blocks of the writable vdisk and backing store from disk into a memory of the storage system;

17 a writable vdisk indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
18 field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular  
19 hole of the plurality of holes;

20  
21 a backing store indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
22 backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect  
23 block, each backing store indirect block field having a pointer to a data block;

24  
25 a special loading function for searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect  
26 block for one or more fields representing a hole; and

27  
28 a write allocator for replacing each field representing a hole in the writable vdisk  
29 indirect block with a new pointer to the data referenced by the corresponding backing  
30 store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is  
31 unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed  
32 since the writable vdisk was created.

1 10. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the write allocator further  
2 comprises:

3 ~~is further adapted to: choose~~

4 a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered data content,  
5 set bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block, and place the  
6 new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the writable vdisk indirect  
7 block to replace the hole.

1 11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the write allocator is further adapted  
2 to:

3 free the dirty data block and write the newly allocated data block to disk.

1 12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the backdoor message handler loads the  
2 blocks of the writable vdisk and the blocks of the backing store during periods of reduced  
3 processing activity.

1 13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the pointers contained in the writable  
2 vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields comprise logical  
3 volume block numbers (VBNs).

4 14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the invalid pointers contained in the writ-  
5 table vdisk indirect block fields comprise a zero logical volume block number (VBN).

1 15. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the plurality of fields in the writable  
2 vdisk indirect block comprises a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of fields in  
3 the backing store indirect block comprises a backing store level 1 buffer.

1 16 – 18 (Cancelled)

2 19. (Currently Amended) A data storage system apparatus, comprising:  
3  
4 ~~separating data blocks referenced by a writable virtual disk (vdisk) from data blocks ref-~~  
5 ~~erenced only by a backing store of a storage system, the method comprising the steps of:~~  
6  
7 means for creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable  
8 vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable  
9 vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at lo-  
10 cations referencing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was cre-  
11 ated;

means for maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

means for loading blocks of the writable vdisk from a disk into a memory, the loaded blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular hole of the plurality of holes;

means for loading blocks of the backing store from a disk into the memory, the loaded blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect block, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a data block;

means for searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and

means for replacing each field having a hole in the writable vdisk indirect block with a new pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created .

20. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium, including program instructions executing on a computer, the program instructions including instructions for performing the steps of:

creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at locations referencing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

9            maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data  
10 storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

11  
12            loading blocks of the writable vdisk from a disk into a memory, the loaded blocks  
13 including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each field storing a  
14 valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular hole of the plu-  
15 rality of holes;

16            loading blocks of the backing store from a disk into the memory, the loaded  
17 blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each backing  
18 store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect block, one  
19 or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a data block;

20            searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and

21            replacing each field having a hole in the writable vdisk indirect block with a new  
22 pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block  
23 field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the  
24 writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk  
25 was created.

21 – 22 (Cancelled)

Please add new claims 23 et seq., as follows:

- 1    23. (New) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:  
2            creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk refer-  
3    encing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was cre-  
4    ated, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at a location refer-  
5    encing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
6            maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
7    data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
8            searching each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and  
9            referencing each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data block referenced by  
10   the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk to reference  
11   both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which  
12   has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.
- 1    24. (New) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2            dirtying the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable  
3    write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.
- 1    25. (New) The method of claim 23 further comprising:  
2            choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing the an unal-  
3    tered data content;  
4            setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5            placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the wri-  
6    table vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.
- 1    26. (New) The method of claim 25, further comprising:



2           freeing the dirty data block; and

3           writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1   27. (New) The method of claim 26 further comprising the:

2       releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby

3       separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

1   28. (New) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

2       including logical volume block numbers (VBNs) in the pointers contained in the

3       writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields.

1   29. (New) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

2       using a zero logical volume block number (VBN) as the invalid pointers con-

3       tained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1   30. (New) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

2       using a writable vdisk level 1 buffer for the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk

3       indirect block and using a backing store level 1 buffer for the plurality of fields in the

4       backing store indirect block.

1   31. (New) A data storage system, comprising:

2       a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk refer-  
3       encing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was cre-  
4       ated, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at a location refer-  
5       encing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

6       a backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the data storage  
7       system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

8       a processor to search each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and

9           the processor to reference each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data  
10   block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable  
11   vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created  
12   and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1   32. (New) The system of claim 31, further comprising:

2           the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block are dirtied to enable  
3   write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.

1   33. (New) The system of claim 31 further comprising:

2           a new pointer chosen for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered  
3   data content;  
4           bits are set in a block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5           a new pointer to the newly allocated data block placed into a field of the writable  
6   vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1   34. (New) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

2           the dirty data block is freed; and  
3           the newly allocated data block is written to disk.

1   35. (New) The system of claim 34 further comprising the:

2           an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store is released to thereby  
3   separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

1   36. (New) The system of claim 31, further comprising:

2           logical volume block numbers (VBNs) included in the pointers contained in the  
3   writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields.

1 37. (New) The system of claim 31, further comprising:  
2 a zero logical volume block number (VBN) used as the invalid pointers contained  
3 in the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1 38. (New) The system of claim 31, further comprising:  
2 a writable vdisk level 1 buffer used for the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk  
3 indirect block and a backing store level 1 buffer used for the plurality of fields in the  
4 backing store indirect block.

1 39. (New) A computer readable media, comprising:  
2 said computer readable media containing instructions for execution on a processor  
3 for a method of method for operating a data storage system, the method having,  
4 creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk refer-  
5 encing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was cre-  
6 ated, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole is at a location refer-  
7 encing data which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
8 maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
9 data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
10 searching each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and  
11 referencing each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data block referenced by  
12 the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk to reference  
13 both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which  
14 has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.